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# From isolation to integration : an in-class writing model for literacy specialists

Sarah Nadine Dorsey

*University of Northern Iowa*

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## From isolation to integration : an in-class writing model for literacy specialists

### Abstract

The article describes descriptive research about one Reading Recovery teacher's design and implementation of a nine week in-class writing model in a first grade classroom. The instructional model was implemented for 45 minutes daily for nine weeks and included mini-lessons, shared writing, writing about a read-aloud, independent writing, and opportunities for students to share their writing. Discussed are the theory and rationale, design, implementation, and findings resulting from the additional instruction.

The benefits of the short-term model include improvements in all students' writing, stronger connections between pull-out and in-class writing for Reading Recovery students, improved self-perceptions of writers, increased collaboration between the Reading Recovery and classroom teacher, and opportunities for more personalized instruction. Also included is a special focus and analysis of how four Reading Recovery students benefited from the specialized instruction. In the future, the teachers would like to expand the model, making it a long-term intervention in all first grade classrooms in their schools.

From Isolation to Integration:  
An In-Class Writing Model for Literacy Specialists

A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the Division of Literacy  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By  
Sarah Nadine Dorsey  
May 2007

This research paper by: Sarah Nadine Dorsey

Title: From Isolation to Integration: An In-Class Writing Model for Literacy Specialists

Has been approved for meeting the research requirements for  
Degree of Masters of Arts in Education

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## **Introduction**

### **Abstract**

The article describes descriptive research about one Reading Recovery teacher's design and implementation of a nine week in-class writing model in a first grade classroom. The instructional model was implemented for 45 minutes daily for nine weeks and included mini-lessons, shared writing, writing about a read aloud, independent writing, and opportunities for students to share their writing. Discussed are the theory and rationale, design, implementation, and findings resulting from the additional instruction. The benefits of the short-term model include improvements in all students' writing, stronger connections between pull-out and in-class writing for Reading Recovery students, improved self-perceptions of writers, increased collaboration between the Reading Recovery and classroom teacher, and opportunities for more personalized instruction. Also included is a special focus and analysis of how four Reading Recovery students benefited from the specialized instruction. In the future, the teachers would like to expand the model, making it a long-term intervention in all first grade classrooms in their school.

### **Rationale**

I studied this model for several reasons. I have a strong interest in early writing instruction. This is a new model that was developed to serve a need and meet a specific goal in my school. I wanted to determine its worth and help the staff in my building decide if it should be implemented as a long-term program in all first grade classrooms. I also wrote the article to share these findings with other literacy teachers so that they may find value and ways to implement the model or parts of it in their buildings.

**Purpose of Article being Published**

This short-term model has shown success in one first grade classroom. Other literacy and classroom teachers may identify some of the same needs and may benefit from learning about this model. Literacy teachers and classroom teachers may learn more about the theory, practice, and design of this model from the article. They may have a place for it or pieces of it in their classrooms. I want to share the development and findings with others so that children can benefit from it.

**Importance of the Article**

This article is important to young writers. When teachers understand the theory and methods of a successful model, they can reflect on and improve their own practice.

Young writers will benefit as a result. In addition, many articles have been written and much research done on writing instruction, but I have not found a study that details a Title I or Reading Recovery teacher providing in-class writing instruction. This article will add to the library of research about writing instruction in a unique way.

**Terminology**

This model was implemented as a short-term intervention. Throughout the paper, I use the term model and intervention to refer to the instructional time in the classroom.

**Methodology**

I wrote this article for classroom and literacy teachers. *The Reading Teacher* is a well-known journal with high-quality articles, so I followed the publication guidelines from the editor. This manuscript is an expanded one that will be condensed when submitted for publication.

## **Guidelines**

- Cover Letter including your name and affiliation as you would have them published, your mailing address and e-mail address. Any co-authors should be listed in preferred order, with name, affiliation, and contact information.
- Abstract of 150 words written in the 3rd person
- One full copy of the manuscript.
- One blind copy using the word Author instead of your name. Remove coauthor names or publication titles. Mask any city, state, institutional affiliation, or links to personal websites.
- Tables and figures as needed (included in total word count). Any information from footnotes and appendixes should be incorporated in the main text.

## **Data Gathered**

- Independent writing samples administered and scored by classroom teacher
- Journal of significant happenings and reflections about lessons
- Daily writing samples
- Interviews of classroom teacher and students

## **Writing Process**

- Gathered background theory and information
- Outlined sections of the article
- Wrote parts of manuscript
- Analyzed data
- Recorded findings
- Added examples, tables, and figures



Submission Letter to *The Reading Teacher*

May 31, 2007

Dr. D. Ray Reutzel  
Dr. Judith Mitchell  
Managing Editors, *The Reading Teacher*  
International Reading Association  
800 Barksdale Road  
PO Box 8139  
Newark, DE 19714-8139 USA

Dear Editors:

Attached are two copies of the manuscript entitled, "From Isolation to Integration: An In-Class Writing Model For Literacy Specialists." I would like to submit this article to review for publication in *The Reading Teacher*. I have not submitted this manuscript to any other publication.

I am a Reading Recovery and Title One teacher. This year, our first grade team wanted to improve writing instruction to meet the broad, varied needs of the first grade writers in my building. Together, we designed a model that integrated my Title 1 services into the classroom to teach daily, small group writing. I believe this model is unique because, in most cases, Title I Literacy teachers primarily teach reading. I had the opportunity to provide writing instruction explicitly in the classroom. This manuscript would contribute to research on collaboration, writing instruction, and literacy support instruction.

Please review my manuscript for publication. I look forward to receiving a response from your reviewers and you.

Sincerely,

Sarah N. Dorsey  
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**From Isolation to Integration:  
An In-Class Writing Model for Literacy Specialists**

by  
**Sarah Nadine Dorsey**  
Waterloo Schools  
Waterloo, Iowa

**Abstract**

The article describes descriptive research about one Reading Recovery teacher's design and implementation of a nine week in-class writing model in a first grade classroom. The instructional model was implemented for 45 minutes daily for nine weeks and included mini-lessons, shared writing, writing about a read aloud, independent writing, and opportunities for students to share their writing. Discussed are the theory and rationale, design, implementation, and findings resulting from the additional instruction. The benefits of the short-term model include improvements in all students' writing, stronger connections between pull-out and in-class writing for Reading Recovery students, improved self-perceptions of writers, increased collaboration between the Reading Recovery and classroom teacher, and opportunities for more personalized instruction. Also included is a special focus and analysis of how four Reading Recovery students benefited from the specialized instruction. In the future, the teachers would like to expand the model, making it a long-term intervention in all first grade classrooms in their school.

## From Isolation to Integration:

## An In-Class Writing Model for Literacy Specialists

*"I don't know what to write!"* As a Title I and Reading Recovery teacher, those words screech in my sensitive ears like nails on a chalkboard, because I know that my first grade students are genuinely creative storytellers. When telling stories, my students naturally include the components of great pieces of writing: well-developed characters, detailed settings, interesting sequences of events, and the clear reasons for sharing. Most of their stories are based on their everyday lives and experiences. The brilliance is there. The desire to share is present.

These oral stories would be interesting written stories to share and are meaningful to the tellers, but the young writers' oral language is more complex than their written language (Traw, 1993). Many of my students tense up and shy away from writing the stories about their lives. When writing, they revert to "safe" language and use of known words. The sentence structure becomes simple and redundant.

How is the message and intriguing content cut into minimal pieces when the students are asked to "write" the stories they share? How can my Title I support be improved to assure that students connect my writing instruction to their independent classroom work? How can supplemental in-class writing instruction guide these first graders to make the shift from storytellers to authors?

## Title I Services

These questions were raised a few years ago as I struggled with the place of writing instruction in my Title I literacy groups. Pull-out literacy groups tend to focus on small group reading and reading skills and less on writing. Writing is usually taught as an extension to reading in both my pull-out and in-class literacy groups.

It was during my first year as a Title I teacher that I realized how isolated this type of instruction was for the students *and* me. Richard Allington (2006) has expressed great concerns about the fragmented remedial teaching curriculum that many struggling readers and writers receive. This form of Title I service has begun to shift in the past 10 years. Research has indicated that remedial instruction becomes more effective when it matches and aligns with the classroom instruction (Dunn, 2004; Johnston, Allington, & Afflerbach, 1985; Meyers, Gelheiser, Yelich, & Gallagher, 1990). The congruence between curriculum and instruction can be greater when using an in-class support model (Bean, 1999).

I believe that a well-organized and implemented in-class literacy model can engender equal and high expectations for all learners; the model provides an opportunity to scaffold learners to become independent creative thinkers who learn from their own efforts (Miles, Steele, Hubs, Hank, & Mellette, 2004). Supplemental instruction is most successful when it is challenging, individualized, and provided in the children's classroom. See Figure 1 for further comparison between pullout and in-class supplemental literacy instruction. The table shows the differences in who is served, how students are served, and how planning differs between the two types of instruction.

### Opportunity Knocks

Recently, the first grade teachers in my building began discussing a problem that they were facing. Many of the first grade students have great needs. The building demographics consist of 92 % African American students, and 89% of the school population receives free or reduced lunches. The teachers felt overwhelmed by the variety of social, emotional, and academic needs of the children in their classrooms and the demands to fit all of the required instruction into each day. In particular, they wanted to find a means to meet the writing needs of all of the students more effectively and efficiently. We all recognized how complex and individualized the writing process is. We knew that our students struggled for many reasons. We believed that we must have a good understanding of these reasons to effectively teach our students (Hagopian & Eitelgeorge & Barrett, 2004).

One reason writers struggle is that, early on, they may view writing as uninteresting and do not see a valued purpose for it. Other students see writing as an act that demands perfect spelling, handwriting, and conventions (Bradley, 2001).

Another reason children struggle is because they don't have the background and experience with written language necessary for purposeful and effective writing. They have read fewer texts and have fewer known words to work with. They may also not have enough experiences to know what quality written language sounds like (Furr, 2003).

Teachers may also have some incorrect assumptions about what children "know" when they enter school. Marie Clay (1975) has cautioned that we should not assume students are attentive during whole group instruction. Clay states, "If the teacher examines things she says to her class, to small groups and to individual children she may

find that she takes for granted some insights which some children do not have” (p.4). For example, young writers may not understand that they are using their writing to make meaning and present their understanding to an audience. The written language and the oral language teachers use as they instruct may also be unfamiliar to some students. Confusions are likely to form.

Writers may struggle for many reasons, but all children have strengths that can help them move forward in their writing development. They have interests that spark stories, and many have well developed storytelling skills. In our school this was the case. We realized that we needed to design a writing model that would provide rich opportunities for these struggling writers to grow and progress.

A meeting was scheduled between the building Reading Coach and the classroom teachers. They contacted me to brainstorm with them and help solve this problem. Small group creative writing instruction came up as an ideal solution, because it would allow time and more individualized instruction for the learners. With smaller groups, behavior problems are not as much of an issue, and students have more responsibility to attend to instruction. Additionally, Clay (1975) says, “Creative writing activities can be an excellent compliment to a reading programme” (p. 4).

Next our attention turned to implementation matters, and questions arose. From where would the time come for writing instruction? How would the class be organized for this instruction? I had a block of time reserved for first grade pullout instruction. We wondered if I could be effective as a resource for one or more of the teachers in pursuing this small group-writing model. I reflected on how the struggling readers and *all* students

in one classroom might benefit from my instruction in the classroom rather than just serving the children targeted for Title 1 assistance in a small group.

We also discussed the goals and focus for the writing instruction. We decided that the instruction should foster conversation and oral language as a primary means of developing a story for writing. Children are naturally storytellers, and writing is naturally a social process (Bradley, 2001). We, as teachers, have a responsibility and an opportunity to help all of the students in the class discover this power and move toward independence as writers (Peirce, 2006). Children must learn how to transform thoughts to oral language and on to the written word (Matczuk, 2005). The teacher must be the children's memories at first to guide the children from an oral story to a written one (Clay, 1993; Dorn, 1998; Peirce, 2006). It is easier for children to hold the stories when they are personal, meaningful ones. They are less likely to forget before it is written. Over time, following periods with supportive and instructional teacher talk, the oral composition of the text will become internalized (Clay, 2001; Peirce, 2006; Boocock & McNaughton, 1998). Therefore, we designed an in-class guided writing model, which was intended to provide a scaffold for the children's transformation from oral to written text.

### The In-Class Guided Writing Model

Following broad research of writing instruction and Title I designs (Allington, & Afflerbach, 1985; Boocock & McNaughton, 1998), and after reflecting about the first graders' writing needs, the first grade classroom teachers and I collaborated to plan for a 45-minute block of writing time. We decided to begin with one first grade class, with



hopes of being able to expand this program to include the other trained Reading Recovery teachers and the other two first grade classrooms the following year.

We targeted one particular classroom for the initial implementation of this model because, based on the district assessments given at the beginning of the year, it had the highest number of struggling readers. The class was comprised of 18 students of African-American descent and one student of European-American descent. Ten of the students were boys and nine were girls. One child was in a retention year. Five of the 19 students received daily, intensive, one-on-one instruction in a pullout Reading Recovery program during the course of the writing model.

Although providing writing instruction in a first grade classroom is not novel, the model that we adopted was new to our district. The model was based on the consistent use of Reading Recovery language and practices (Clay, 1993). The classroom teacher was interested in learning and applying that language in future instruction, so my instruction was also intended to provide demonstrations for her. As we reflected on the students' needs and progress, the model changed and continued to evolve throughout the nine weeks of the intervention. During the first half of the intervention, I worked with half of the students on writing, while the classroom teacher worked with the other half of the students on word study. Then we switched groups of children and repeated our lessons. Figure 2 shows the weekly writing instruction schedule that evolved. In the following paragraphs, I describe each day's activities.

### *Monday*

I taught editing and revision mini-lessons for 5-10 minutes based on something the classroom teacher suggested or something I observed in their writing. I started by

using the Daily Oral Language sentences provided in the district writing curriculum. A few weeks into the instruction, I reflected on ways to make this time more meaningful and applicable to the students. Van Sluys and Lamam (2006) state, "...daily oral language (DOL) tasks ask students to correct an outside author's use of conventions... isolate punctuation and grammar as though they are mechanical acts, disconnected from meaning with singular, right ways for use" (p. 222). I believe that teaching about these concepts is important. So to improve the effectiveness of this activity, I decided to choose a few sentences from the students' previous writing to practice applying the concept. The skills were still taught in mini-lessons out of the context of whole story writing, but the examples came from the writers, and that made it more meaningful and valuable to them (Clay, 2005).

One such lesson occurred early in the intervention. I had observed several students writing about *big* and *good* things. The topics themselves were fine, but I wanted them to take a risk and make their writing more interesting for readers by using synonyms for *big* and *good*. I pulled two sentences from two students' writing. I first asked the students for permission and both were proud to have me write part of their stories on the white board. We focused on the following sentences (All names are pseudonyms.):

From D'Quan: (writing about making noodles) "They are so good."

From Michaela: (writing about a picnic) "A big bird ate my sandwich!"

Using the idea of *dollar words*, which had been given to me by another reading teacher in my building, I introduced synonyms by comparing one dollar to one hundred dollars. I told the students that *good* was a *one dollar* word. It was not too exciting, and

we couldn't do too much with it. I asked them what words would mean the same as *good*, but would be more exciting for our readers? We came up with a list of words that included *great*, *delicious*, and *yummy*. Next we created a list for the *one* dollar word *big* that included *enormous*, *huge*, and *great big*. We decided that these words were *hundred dollar* words and we would try to use them in our writing. The mini-lesson appeared to be successful. I read many stories that week that included more interesting words to replace *good* and *big*. *Big* and *good* were two extremely common descriptive words used in most every story. This lesson helped the readers take the risk of using more interesting words.

In my Monday mini-lessons, I focused on five areas of editing and revision: capitalization, punctuation, spacing, clarity, and legibility. I taught the students that these are five things writers check to make their writing better. We used our own hand as a resource to remember the five areas. I called it "give me five."

### *Tuesday*

I read a story aloud and the children listened to the story as writers. Read alouds are an important component of writing instruction because they provide opportunities for children to learn about book structures, hear book language, increase vocabulary knowledge, and have opportunities to write about books (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). The students talked about the story as I facilitated the conversation. We discussed who the author wrote about (characters), where the author wrote that the story took place (setting), what the problem was and how it was fixed in the story. We also discussed the big idea and what the author was trying to tell us as readers--not about the elements of the book, but about our lives (e.g., cooperation, caring, not giving up). Next we extended the

text through “shared writing.” I wrote as the children dictated ideas about the characters, problem, and solution in the story. This was a means of practicing retelling and comprehension in written form. The students used language and thought to redevelop the story. After writing about two books in shared writing, I gave them the opportunity to write independently about the stories we read each week. First, following the read aloud, the students shared ideas about the story orally with the group or with partners. Many talked about the characters, problem, and the solution to the stories. Other talked about details they recalled. I helped the students organize their thoughts. Then they wrote individually about the stories.

### *Wednesday*

We wrote a shared story about a teacher-selected topic. We brainstormed ideas and talked about the development of our story. Then, using language and modeling, I wrote the story using and shaping the students’ ideas. Modeling is important in writing instruction because it provides a clear demonstration for students and serves as an advanced organizer for planning, a structure for making meaning during instruction, and an internal guide that supports independent writing (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). Upon completion, we read the story several times, talking about the message and some components connected to our recent editing and revision learning. We also made connections relating to the characters, setting, problem, and solution to the previous day’s read aloud. During the last few minutes of this lesson, the students brainstormed ideas for their personal stories. Sometimes I selected the broad topic (e.g., adventures, talking toys, pets) and the students chose an idea within that topic (e.g., a secret tree house, talking Bratz doll, a pet T-rex). The topics I chose related to our shared writing story.

Clay (1991) states that it is beneficial for the teacher to choose a theme and “allow children to write on whatever aspect of that theme they choose” (p. 110).

At other times, the students chose their own topics. According to Clay, “Children quickly become used to the fact that there is a time and place for writing every day” (1991, p. 110). Because of the daily anticipation, some students came to writing time with a special topic in mind. Many students still tended to talk and write about our shared writing topic or about the book we had read that week. Some students did choose unrelated topics, but in those cases, I noticed that they engaged in less conversation with the other students about their writing.

#### *Thursday*

We reread and talked about our shared story. We then reviewed the ideas the students chose for their independent writing. Just before sending students back to their seats to write, I quickly and individually reviewed the students’ topics with them and how they were going to get started. After each brief (about 15 seconds) conference, I would give the students writing paper and they would proceed back to their seats to get started as I continued to conference with others. For example, Kellen and I had the following exchange:

Teacher: Kellen, tell me about your story.

Kellen: It’s about a tree house adventure. Me and my brother are going to build a secret house in the backyard.

Teacher: Wow! I can’t wait to read about what happens! I bet you and Kaylon (his brother) will have an amazing adventure, huh.

Kellen: Yeah, and we found a secret door and my grandpa came with us too.

Teacher: Great! Go ahead and get busy writing about it!

Finally, the students had time to think and write. During this session, I moved around the room, offering supportive prompts when students appealed for help or seemed off task or confused. Students also helped each other spell unknown words and reminded each other to check the five areas of editing. Though students only had about 15 minutes to write that day, their ideas were in their minds, and they could focus on the putting existing and developing ideas into written form.

*Friday*

The students continued writing and revised and finished their stories. They worked together to reread, edit, and revise their stories. I also met individually with the students. They read their stories to me. I shared positive feedback with students and also offered a powerful teaching point to help them write with the writing of other stories. For example, if a child seemed to have missed a lot of sounds in a word with more than one syllable, I might show and practice how to clap the parts of long words to break them down and make them easier to write (Clay, 1993). I also prompted students to elaborate on ideas or focus them on the main topic of the story.

Then, as students completed their stories, they moved to an area in the back of the room to share their stories with other students who were also finished with their writing. The sharing of the story gives the students ownership of their creation and a responsibility to produce writing that will be interesting for others to hear. It makes the writers authors (Fisher, 1991).

The format for the week was structured, but the writing within this structure was creative and gave ownership to the students. Each day's activities contributed to the benefits of using this writing instruction model.

### Benefits, Benefits, Benefits

The model resulted in a number of benefits for the students and the teachers involved. The students' scores on the district writing assessment indicate that the students improved in their writing. Particularly, the children who were enrolled in Reading Recovery showed improvement. Also improved were the students' perceptions of themselves as writers. In addition to the positive gains in student writing, I worked with students in smaller groups, so I was able to provide more personalized instruction compared to what I could offer a large group. The nature of the working relationships between Reading Recovery and classroom teachers also changed for the better. The classroom teacher and I both believe that, because of this intervention, both our collaborative relationship and our methods of teaching young writers improved considerably.

### *Improvements in Writing*

To analyze growth in writing development, we used district-required independent writing samples. These assessments were administered at the beginning of the year and at the end of the second quarter, which correlated with the end of the in-class writing intervention. The classroom teacher scored the independent writing samples using the district-created writing rubric (see Table 1). The rubric outlines specific criteria for documentation of growth and, in a sense, provides an overview of where first grade writers should be throughout the school year (a rating of 1 is expected at the beginning of

the year, and a rating of 3 or 4 is expected by the end of the year). The classroom teacher and I expected the students to score a 2 in each area on the rubric at the end of the intervention.

Analysis of the classroom students' writing sample scores revealed some encouraging, exciting areas of improvement. The averages of the students' scores improved nearly one point in each of the five areas (Table 2). In the area *Ideas*, students averaged 1.4 at the beginning of the year and 2.4 at the end of the intervention. In both *Organization* and *Word Choice*, the scores improved from a 1.2 at the beginning of the year to 1.9 at the end of the intervention. Scores in the area of *Sentence Structure and Variety* improved from 1.2 to 2 at the end of the intervention. In the area of *Conventions*, students averaged a rating of 1 at the beginning of the year and 1.9 at the end of the intervention.

The growth is due to several factors, including instruction during this intervention, Reading Recovery lessons for some students, classroom writing, and maturity. The classroom teacher saw greater and more rapid improvement by these children than other first grade students she taught in past years. We believe that the in-class writing model has contributed to the increased growth because it is the factor that changed.

Following just nine weeks with this writing model, half of the students' scores on their independent writing samples increased in the areas of *ideas*, *organization*, and *sentences structure and variety* (Table 3). A few students' scores even jumped from a rating of one to a rating of three.



Nine of 19 students improved their rating in the area of *conventions*, and important individual improvements were shown. Students mostly used capital letters and spacing appropriately throughout their independent writing samples. Fourteen of the 19 students scored a 2 or better, showing that they were beginning to understand conventions, but were not yet consistent in their use.

The writing sample scores at the end of the intervention indicated that some of the writers continued to struggle in some areas. Still, almost all of the nineteen students did improve the use of variety of their sentences. Early in the instruction, most students wrote lists of “safe” sentences that they were comfortable writing. (I like..., I went to..., I am going..., I eat...). In the second assessment, only 25% of the students made a list of the safe “I...” sentences. The others wrote stories that contained basic story elements: characters, setting, plot. Two students also included dialog in their stories. Encouraging, too, was the fact that every student maintained the topic of the story throughout the writing piece. Topics varied, from stories about families, toys, playing, and wanting to be a superstar, to a story about wanting to meet Tony Hawk. Figure 3 shows one student’s shift from a piece that consisted of a series of unrelated sentences to a topic-centered piece about her Barbies.

During post-instruction interviews with the students, I learned even more about the topics the students chose to write about. Students wrote on one topic on their independent writing samples, and they shared more information that showed their understanding that writing is about something specific. The following are some examples of their comments:

“I like to write about stuff like cats, and toys, Barbies...”

“I like to write about people and my friends.”

“I like to write about people in my journal.”

“I don’t like to write. Well, actually, I just like to write about dinosaurs. They are my favorite species.”

Beyond the improvements shown on the district writing assessment, the students demonstrated other changes in their writing behaviors. The classroom teacher gave her observations about the ways the students began to use what was learned during the writing intervention in their independent journals and other classroom writing. “First of all, my students are writing more and they don’t ask how long or how many sentences they need to write. They know how to stop and go back and check over their writing and extend it. They use capitalization 99% of the time in their daily writing. Students look for more descriptive words to use in their writing and add more details too. The kids also know that they need to check the five finger editing and go back in their writing and look for those things.”

The assessments and the student and classroom teacher feedback support my informal observations of growth in the students’ writing. The teacher and I also observed positive connections between four students’ performance in Reading Recovery lessons and their classroom writing. In fact, the benefits for Reading Recovery students during this model were greater than we had expected.

### *Improvements in the Performance of Students in Reading Recovery*

As a Reading Recovery and Title I teacher, I am always concerned about whether and how my students connect what they learn in my class to their own classroom setting. By “pushing” into the children’s classroom for instruction, I was able to monitor whether

what was learned in Reading Recovery was connected to classroom work. I was teaching concepts that were important for independent classroom writing, and I could connect our Reading Recovery writing lessons to the same concepts and use the same, consistent language. I also prompted my Reading Recovery students to think of topics and attempt unknown words in their classroom writing just as I did in our individual lessons.

Following the writing component of our Reading Recovery lesson, the students and I would talk about how to extend the story we wrote in Reading Recovery or we would make a list of topics they could write in their classroom journals later that day (such as writing about a story, family, or a specific event). I wrote the ideas on a sticky note. When the students got back to the classroom, they would turn to the next page in their writing journals and stick the note there. Then, when it was time for journal writing, a reminder was waiting in the students' materials. I used a similar method to remind students about how to write unknown words. We made a list of things to try (such as "say it slowly" and "think of a part you know") and taped the list on the students' desks. Both examples were short-term interventions that were removed as the child developed a self-extending system for writing.

After the nine weeks of instruction, I saw a difference in the ways that some of the Reading Recovery students attempted to write unknown words. In the first few weeks of writing instruction, the groups' primary means for solving an unknown word in writing was to appeal to me or flounder through their classroom words book looking for a particular word. Following classroom and Reading Recovery instruction, most of the Reading Recovery students started to attempt to solve words independently. Students

relied mostly on sound analysis and known parts. In addition, I observed Reading Recovery students confidently helping their classmates write unknown words!

For example, Davon, a struggling reader and Reading Recovery student who lacked confidence and motivation for reading and writing at the beginning of the year, helped another classmate with her writing about four weeks into the intervention. First, he told her to go back and read the sentence again. Then when she got to the unknown word, “brother,” he started saying it slowly for her. He said it slowly twice; then, when she continued to have trouble spelling the word, he decided that was too much work and just spelled it for her. During his weeks in Reading Recovery, his confidence in writing improved along with his reading. Then, in his small classroom group, he felt and acted like an expert in writing. I think this was partially due to his Reading Recovery teacher being in the classroom. He felt like he already knew about “all of this writing stuff.” He became more eager to write both in our small group and in our Reading Recovery lessons. His writing became clearer and he started to apply the concepts from class and Reading Recovery lessons to his independent writing. The connection between Reading Recovery and the classroom was the link Davon needed to accelerate as a writer and a student. Figure 4 shows Davon’s writing sample from the beginning of the year and his mid-year independent writing sample. Davon showed improvement in all areas of the rubric on his mid-year writing sample when compared to his beginning of the year sample.

Another benefit of this model is that the Title 1 teacher is able to observe his or her Reading Recovery students in their classroom *every day*! I found that I could support them and give them that gentle “reading teacher” nudge throughout their Reading

Recovery program. I knew my Reading Recovery students and their interests and capabilities so I was able to use that information to scaffold their learning by prompting them to use what they knew (Beed, Hawkins, & Roller, 1991).

It was especially beneficial to be able to support Keon, my hardest to reach Reading Recovery student, during classroom writing time. I held Keon responsible for his learning and tried to keep him engaged in writing by making connection between what I knew he could do in Reading Recovery lessons to his classroom writing. However, Keon usually seemed to have other things on his mind during many of our writing lessons. I was able to redirect him by reminding him about how he worked in Reading Recovery, saying, "Show me what a writer looks like." Immediately, he sat up straight, albeit momentarily, and wrote one well-thought-out sentence. I often encouraged him to use topics he enjoyed talking and writing about in Reading Recovery lessons in his classroom stories. He made at least one clear connection between what we did in Reading Recovery lessons and what he could do in his classroom. He told me he could write about Sammy and the pirate, characters from two of his favorite Reading Recovery texts. I observed more evidence of Keon's ability to engage in story writing and connect known information from Reading Recovery with his classroom setting and encouraged these behaviors. In Reading Recovery lessons, his favorite topic to write about was food. He was an expert. He watched "The Food Network" with his Grandma daily. He wrote long, detailed instructions and drew pictures of how to cook and bake some foods that he had never eaten before. Therefore, I used his expertise when brainstorming or composing stories in his classroom. I questioned him and elicited ideas from him, which helped

Keon stay motivated to participate and pay attention through the modeling and instruction.

One of the most difficult times for a Reading Recovery student *and* the Reading Recovery teacher is that transition back into the classroom when the series of Reading Recovery lessons is complete. I always plan to observe and support my first round students in their classrooms on a regular basis, but, in reality, I quickly become wrapped up in my new students. My good intentions become just that--intentions. In the future, my participation in this writing instruction model could and will allow me to provide support and still maintain my high expectations of my Reading Recovery students after their series of Reading Recovery lessons are complete.

All of the connections between children's Reading Recovery lessons and their classroom performance advance their ability for extending and internalizing their learning. In this study, their independent writing samples are evidence of their growth and progress toward developing a self-extending system (Clay, 2002).

#### *Writing Rubric Results for Reading Recovery Students*

I provided individual pull-out instruction to two of the Reading Recovery students in the class during the weeks of the classroom writing intervention. Three other students were also being served by another Reading Recovery teacher. Three of these five students successfully discontinued their series of Reading Recovery lessons at about the same time the study concluded. The other two children were recommended for additional outside services following a twenty-week Reading Recovery program.

Table 4 shows the changes in writing behaviors from the beginning to the end of the intervention for four of the five Reading Recovery students. One student, Keon, moved before the intervention concluded.

Davon, whose writing samples are shown in Figure 4, showed improvement in all areas addressed by the rubric. Although his first sample consists of two seemingly unrelated sentences, he did write two complete sentences and showed some understanding of conventions. His mid-year writing sample is a retelling of a story read earlier that day in class. He wrote a title and used a logical sequence to share details of the story. He also wrote about the problem in the story and how it was resolved. He used some variety in his sentence structure (ex. *The next day* and *Then*) and chose descriptive words to portray the scene. He shows control of many conventions and seems to mostly understand the concept of where a sentence starts and ends. The classroom teacher and I believe this growth was due to many factors including the in-class writing instruction, Reading Recovery, increased parental support, and the increase in Davon's overall confidence in himself as a learner and his maturity level.

In Jordan's first writing sample (Figure 5), he wrote a list of 14 sentences about what he likes, with no variety in sentence structure and limited word choice. He used capitalization and punctuation inconsistently. In his second sample (Figure 5), Jordan showed improvement in the areas of organization, sentence structure and variety, and conventions. Although the second sample contained little sentence variety and limited use of words, it did stay on one topic. Jordan also used conventions more appropriately on the second sample.

Keishawn's initial writing sample was difficult to read (Figure 6). It consisted of a string of letters and numbers scattered around the page, mostly *W*, *P*, *t*, and 8.

Identifiable are half of his name and the word *go*. In contrast, Keishawn wrote a numbered list of *things he can do* on his mid-year independent writing sample (Figure 6). This sample showed that he had learned to write some high frequency words.

Capitalization and spacing were much improved. However, he used little variety in structure and word choice. The latter sample was in stark contrast to his daily classroom story writing and his Reading Recovery journal. Both his Reading Recovery teacher and I had seen more complete story development and better use of conventions in his guided writing.

Marquan copied five words in all capital letters from a poster in the classroom for his beginning independent writing sample (Figure 7). He wrote the words in a list. His letters were easy to read and he left good space between each line of text. For his second writing sample (Figure 7), Marquan wrote about a book I had read earlier that week. He had enjoyed the book and he wrote a lot about it after we read it. For the writing sample, he basically wrote the same story he had written earlier in the week in writing class.

Marquan told about the friends in the story and about how they got in a fight. He also added a personal sentence about how he is happy that the boys are friends again. His writing was hard to read in the sample. The letters were loosely formed and he did not spell many words correctly. He also left especially large spaces between words. He showed some understanding of conventions, but not consistently. However, Marquan did show improvement on all areas measured by the rubric.



These improvements on independent writing samples show what these students were able to do without teacher support. I was disappointed that there was little evidence of some of the strategies being used by the students, but was encouraged by other applications learned from both Reading Recovery lessons and classroom instruction. For example, two of the four Reading Recovery students wrote about books we had read in class. This type of writing is encouraged in both Reading Recovery and in classroom writing instruction. The growth between the two samples for each of the students is also clear. In my opinion, neither Keishawn nor Marquan's initial samples deserved even a 1 on the rubric. Though a shift in scores wasn't made on all areas of the rubric, seeing and analyzing each sample reflects the development of writers.

Although the independent writing samples of the Reading Recovery students did not show leaps in improvement across all characteristics identified on the rubric, individual grains were evident in all of the Reading Recovery students' writing. These students also became confident authors who grew to enjoy writing and sharing stories, as did the other students in the class.

### *Students' Perceptions about Themselves as Writers*

The classroom teacher and I believe that the most important result for this short-term writing intervention was that all students made a shift in attitude--from students with fears about writing to authors who are willing to take risks in their writing and story development. Early in the year, the students were not as likely to take risks or engage in writing. They were "doing writing." The classroom teacher said she used to hear, "I can't write about that!" and "That's too much to write!" Now the students see themselves as capable authors! They are creators of a piece of writing that they own and

can share. The classroom teacher said that many times, when she finished a read aloud, students would ask if they *got* to write about the book. I can honestly say, with the classroom teacher's endorsement, that by the end of the term all students truly showed evidence of enjoyment during our writing time every day. Even the most reluctant, resistant writers had begun to look forward to writing. By the end of the writing intervention, the students were attentive and mostly on-task during both the instruction and independent writing time. In the last few weeks of the program, a noticeable hush came over the room the moment I handed out the writing paper. It was a peaceful, engaged feeling. As I looked around the room, heads were looking down as pencils were moving across the page. I observed pauses, where a head would pop up with a look of wonder and thought. Then, back to the paper. I heard talking, but it was rarely off task talk. It was the sound of children quietly saying words slowly and recording sounds...independently! It was also the sound of mini-conferences and even peer assistance. I began to hear only sighs when time was up, for the students wanted to write more. All of these struggling writers now wanted to write more!

My post-intervention interviews of the children echoed these observations. The students shared varied reasons for their enjoyment of writing. The following are representative of the comments of all children in the class:

"I enjoy writing because it's fun."

"When I write, I like it. It makes me happy. I'm pretty good at it."

"I like writing because you can grow up and be good."

"I like it because I get to write with you every time you come in my room."

"I like to write a lot at home, at my dad house, and my grandpa house."

"I like to write because it helps us know words and I like it 'cause you teach us how to write good."

"I like it. I just like it. You get to write about stuff."

The children's words are powerful in describing their feelings about writing and what they want to write about. Their opinions convey their perceptions of themselves as writers and their capability to continue to grow as writers. It has been encouraging and motivating to observe the growth in their motivation to write. I have been able to observe individual and group changes because of the smaller group size and capability to provide more personalized instruction.

### *Personalized Instruction*

I worked with only ten students at a time, so I was allowed more time to focus on specific writing needs of each student and to offer more individualized instruction (Dunn, 2004). Classroom teachers have so many demands and each child truly has unique instructional needs. In this model, both the teacher and I were able to personalize instruction in a way that whole group instruction does not allow. We felt that we reached the struggling readers.

For example, after a few weeks of instruction, I arranged my area of the room to better suit the smaller group size. Three students in one of the groups were not comfortable with not spelling words *correctly*. I sat those three close to each other, so that, once the rest of the group was busy writing stories, I could provide more instruction and scaffolding for how first graders figure out how to write unknown words for those three children. I used various levels of support, usually starting with more general scaffolding: "What can you try? Do you know another word like that?" Then, as needed,

I would provide scaffolding that included more specific support (Beed, Hawkins, & Roller, 1991). For these children, sometimes I introduced the idea of Elkonin boxes, which are boxes to represent each sound in a word (Clay, 2002). For example, the word *home* would be represented with three boxes. The child would say the word slowly and record the sounds in each box (*h-o-m*). I also prompted students by telling or writing a word or part that is like it (a specific prompt may be, “If you know *house*, you can figure out *mouse*”) and telling or writing specific known parts in the word for the child. For example, one prompt to a known part might have been, “The word *start* has a part you know, like in the word *car*.” The rest of the group still needed spelling support, but would often figure out developmental spellings of words with more general prompts and brief conferences with me (Beed, Hawkins, & Roller, 1991).

### *Collaboration*

In addition to instructional and writing improvements, the classroom teacher and I built a strong working relationship and collaborated to meet the needs of our students (Schnorr, 2005). During the nine weeks of this exploratory project, we regularly talked about writing growth and planning. I felt that I was working with *her* and not just working with *her kids*. The classroom teacher also felt that the writing objectives were being taught more completely and were given adequate time. She said I was able to introduce and review concepts about writing that previously she had not been able to teach.

Since we were teaching at the same time, it was important that we made decisions together about the writing instruction. The classroom teacher also shared what I was doing in my writing instruction with the other first grade classroom teachers. There were

benefits and valuable lessons gained through this short-term intervention. Not only did we learn about the successes in the model, we identified and set goals to address limitations as well.

### Limitations

Although the classroom teacher, principal, and I are pleased and encouraged by the outcomes that resulted from this in-class writing model, we have also identified some limitations and reflected on ways to overcome them.

Because of time and resources available, I served groups of ten. This was not ideal, but was superior to whole class writing instruction. I would have liked to focus on particular strategies with smaller groups of children to better meet their writing needs. A few of the writers with the richest messages had stories composed of one run-on sentence. Because this was a short-term intervention, I only taught seven lessons on conventions and grammar. They included the use of capitalization (three lessons), punctuation (three lessons), and word choice (one lesson). If I had had more time, I could have given these conventions more attention. I also would have liked to work in smaller groups with the struggling readers. I could have spent more time addressing their writing needs and emphasized the ways writing and reading are connected.

### Implications

I feel privileged to have been able to spend this time, devoted exclusively to writing instruction, with these children. The classroom teacher and I have identified implications for the future of this in-class writing instruction model for first grade classrooms and made plans for the continuation of this program in our building.

- This model works to supplement the needs of the students and provides models for the teacher. It provides explicit and consistent instruction for the writers who struggle the most—the children who are enrolled in Reading Recovery. Because of this, the model is something that our building would like to continue and to expand across other first grade classrooms.
- We believe that the children would show even more benefits if we were able to work with the children in smaller groups (e.g., five students) in order to address individual and small group needs.
- We also see the benefits and the need to possibly implement this model in small groups with only the Reading Recovery students. This allows more realistic scheduling and attends to the children who need the most support in writing development.
- The model would be strengthened by having a longer period of time (more weeks) in order to address all of the areas of writing (all areas addressed by the rubric.)

### Conclusion

Having a literacy specialist in the classroom to provide writing instruction has proven to be beneficial for young writers in our building. The model the classroom teachers and I developed served its purpose and proved to be effective. We have observed changes and improvements in teacher collaboration, in-class writing instruction, student motivation and perceptions, and student's writing development in a short period of time.

The essential components of curricular change were present (Fullan, 2002), which we believe allowed the instructional model to be a successful one. The model was sound,

we had necessary resources and support, and all involved were dedicated, committed to, and knowledgeable about this writing intervention. I borrowed a quote from one of my first graders when she was writing about what would happen if toys could really talk. I have generalized it to convey the power and potential of this type of intense, explicit writing instruction... "It could change everything!"

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Table 1

*First grade rubric used to score independent writing samples at beginning of the year and the end of the intervention.*

	4	3	2	1
<b>Ideas</b>	Presents all ideas clearly.	Presents most ideas clearly.	Presents some ideas clearly.	Random ideas with no focus.
<b>Organization</b>	Has clear, logical sequence with strong opening and closing.	Has logical sequence, but weak opening and/or closing.	Has some evidence of sequence, but no opening or closing.	Has little or no sequence; hard to follow.
<b>Word Choice</b>	Word choices are precise, varied, and colorful.	Word choices include more variety and descriptive words.	Word choices include some variety and descriptive words.	Word choices include little variety and descriptive language.
<b>Sentence Structure and Variety</b>	Has complex sentence structure with a variety of sentences.	Includes complete sentences with some variety in structure.	Includes complete sentences with little variety in structure.	Includes incomplete and/or run-on sentences.
<b>Conventions</b>	Has few errors in grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.	Show control of many conventions.	Shows some understanding of conventions, but not in control of them.	Shows little understanding of conventions.

*Note.* Rubric from *Waterloo Community School 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Language Arts Curriculum Guide*, 2003, Waterloo, IA: Educational Services. Copyright 2003 by Waterloo Community Schools.

Table 2

*Average scores of first grade students on the independent writing sample at the beginning of the year and the end of the intervention.*

	<b>Average score on the independent writing sample: Beginning of the year</b>	<b>Average score on the independent writing sample: End of the intervention</b>	<b>Change in average score from beginning of the year to the end of the intervention</b>
<b>Ideas</b>	1.4	2.3	.9
<b>Organization</b>	1.2	1.9	.7
<b>Word Choice</b>	1.2	1.9	.7
<b>Sentence Structure and Variety</b>	1.2	2	.8
<b>Conventions</b>	1	1.9	.9

Table 3

*Scores on rubric for 1<sup>st</sup> grade independent writing samples at the beginning of the year and the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, the conclusion of the writing instruction model.*

	Beginning of Year			End of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter		
	Number of children receiving each score, N=19			Number of children receiving each score, N=19		
Characteristic	1	2	3	1	2	3
Ideas	11	8	0	1	10	8
Organization	15	4	0	5	10	4
Word Choice	15	4	0	6	8	5
Sentence Structure and Variety	15	4	0	5	9	5
Conventions	16	3	0	5	11	3

Table 4

*Scores on district writing rubric for 1<sup>st</sup> grade Reading Recovery students at the beginning of the year (B) and following the writing intervention (E).*

	Ideas		Organization		Word Choice		Sentence Structure and Variety		Conventions	
	B	E	B	E	B	E	B	E	B	E
<b>Davon</b>	2	3	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	3
<b>Jordan</b>	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2
<b>Keishawn</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
<b>Marquan</b>	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2

## Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Title I model comparison chart.

*Figure 2.* Weekly 1<sup>st</sup> grade writing instruction model.

*Figure 3.* One struggling reader's independent writing samples.

*Figure 4.* Davon's independent writing samples.

*Figure 5.* Jordan's independent writing samples

*Figure 6.* Keishawn's independent writing samples.

*Figure 7.* Marquan's independent writing samples.



<b>Pull-Out Instruction</b>	<b>In-Class Instruction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students are pulled out of the class.</li> <li>-Struggling readers and writers are served by Title I teacher.</li> <li>-Title I teacher sets goals and plans instruction.</li> <li>-Students miss regular classroom instruction during Title I instruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Title I teacher goes into the classroom.</li> <li>-All students in the class are served by Title I teacher.</li> <li>-The Title I teacher and the classroom teacher collaborate to set goals and plan.</li> <li>-This model is part of classroom instruction.</li> </ul>

Day	Daily writing instruction
<b>Monday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson and practice exercises, focusing on writing conventions and grammar.</li> </ul>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student writing in response to a teacher read aloud</li> </ul>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared, descriptive writing about a teacher-chosen broad topic</li> <li>• Engagement in authentic discussion as students brainstorm ideas for their own writing.</li> </ul>
<b>Thursday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rereading and discussion of shared writing.</li> <li>• Review of students topics</li> <li>• Independent writing time</li> <li>• Conferencing with the teacher as needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Friday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of student writing</li> <li>• Revisions</li> <li>• Sharing of the final version with the group.</li> </ul>

8-1-06

I love My Dog  
My Teacher  
Boast Christine

December 5 2006 2-12

I love my Barbie girls.  
I make clothes for my Barbie girls.  
They have a Barbie home.  
I love my Barbie mom.

FORM 707 8/00

Text 1: Aug. 1, 2006

I love my dog. My teacher is the best.

Text 2: Dec. 15, 2006

I love my Barbie girls. I make clothes for my Barbie girls. They have a Barbie home. I love my Barbie mom.

8-1-06

I like my friends.  
my dog is brown.

The Snowy Day  
he put the snow  
in the pocket.  
Then the snow  
melted. Peter was  
sad. Then the  
next day snow fell.  
on the ground. Then  
he was happy. 12/15/06

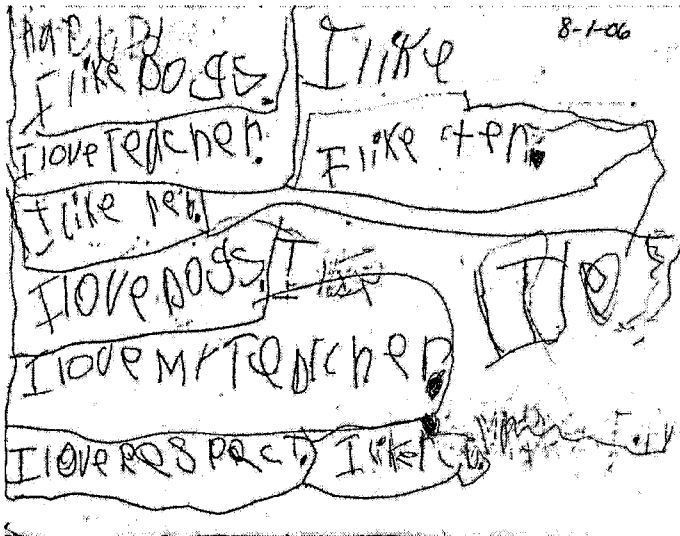
Text 1: Aug. 1, 2006

I like my friends. My dog is brown.

Text 2: Dec. 15, 2006

The Snowy Day

He put the snow in the pocket. Then the snowball melted. Peter was sad. The next day snow fell on the ground. Then he was happy.



Me and Torey and Corey  
play my Smack Down vs Raw  
game we played a long time  
too together. My man was  
John Cena and Torey's man was  
Kane and Corey was Master.

12-15-06

Text 1: Aug. 1, 2006

I like dogs. I like teacher. I like red. I love dogs. I love my teacher. I love respect. I like  
I like ten. I like red.

Text 2: Dec. 15, 2006

Me and Torey and Corey play with Smack Down vs. Raw game. We played a long time  
together. My man was John Cena and Torey's man was Kane and Corey's was Master.

8-1-06

8-1-0

W K O T T K K O N X T T  
W H K W L W W  
W P W H T K S O U G T T  
W O P W L W U  
K E N W A W P K T P H  
O O W W P K T T P  
O O K T T P

156 006

1. Loan Play  
2. Loan Play  
3. Loan Play  
4. Loan Play  
5. Loan Play  
6. Loan Play  
7. Loan Play  
8. Loan Play  
9. Loan Play  
10. Loan Play

Text 1: Aug. 1, 2006

## Letters and numbers

Text 2: Dec. 15, 2006

1. I can play. 2. I can use it. 3. I can read. 4. I can play. 5. I like to play. 1. I love toys. 2. I love super heroes. 3. I can play. 4. I love Olajha. 5. I can play with toys.

8-1-06

TRUSTWORTHINESS

RESPECT

CARING

FAIRNESS

RESPONSIBILITY

The boy hit the other boy because  
he broke his game. The father  
saw this fight there side  
it is no fighting on  
this street.  
He made up and the  
boy hit him again.

12-15-06

Text 1: Aug. 1, 2006

(copied from poster) Trustworthiness Respect Caring Fairness Responsibility

Text 2: Dec. 15, 2006

The boy hit the other boy because he broke his game. The teacher stopped the fight.

They said there is no fighting on this street. They made up and the boy hit him again.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### *Topic*

Early writing instruction has always been a passion of mine. This topic allowed me to study other research and learn from experts in writing. I got to use this information to design and implement a writing model in a classroom. I have developed more ideas that stem from my research in this topic. I am interested in learning more about teaching informational writing to young writers and utilizing technology in classroom writing instruction.

### *Writing*

I learned so much about professional journal writing through this process. I find it difficult to decide how much to include and how to phrase it. I learned that verbs are the most important part of sentences. When strong, active verbs are used, adjectives and adverbs are not necessary. Examples show readers my thinking, and make the article interesting. I appreciate authors of journal articles and their dedication to this process. When educators share with other educators, it provides a powerful means for improved instruction in our field.



## Appendix

### *Author/Publication Guidelines*

- Cover Letter including your name and affiliation as you would have them published, your mailing address and e-mail address. Any co-authors should be listed in preferred order, with name, affiliation, and contact information.
- Abstract of 150 words written in the 3rd person (do not include references or citations).
- One full copy of the manuscript.
- One blind copy using the word Author instead of your name. Remove coauthor names or publication titles. Mask any city, state, institutional affiliation, or links to personal websites.
- Tables and figures as needed (included in total word count). Any information from footnotes and appendixes should be incorporated in the main text.